Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. Greetings from Port Moresby.

My name is Jelta Wong. I am the Minister for Health and HIV/AIDS of Papua New Guinea. This is my first time to participate in the World Health Assembly.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been my baptism into public health, and indeed the first for our country. Confronted with this new disease, our preparedness and response focused on three inter-related strategies:

1) Early alert
2) Decisive leadership and action
3) Working with everyone

Papua New Guinea has a fragile health system. We have 462 doctors and 3,900 nurses to serve 8.5 million people. As early as January, we activated our National Emergency Operations Centre which was pivotal during our Rubella, Measles and Polio response. We knew that the early alert, was an opportunity to prepare for the arrival of COVID-19.

The health team worked round-the-clock since January and focused on measures to heighten surveillance, screen travellers, educate our people and ready our health facilities to fight COVID-19.

A State of Emergency was declared in PNG on 23rd of March, shortly after we detected our first imported case. This enabled the Government to mobilize a whole-of-agency response from Government, Private Sector and Donors.

The State of Emergency was based on the very high-risk assessment for PNG, and the threat from our neighbors who were in the midst of an outbreak. We had to prepare for the worst-case scenario, under the no-regret principle.

As of today, Papua New Guinea has 8 cases of COVID, and no deaths. Our priority is to transition to the new normal.

I thank the World Health Organization and all our partners for your strategic, technical and operational support. On behalf of the Government and people of Papua New Guinea, I wish you all good health and I hope to meet you all at the next World Health Assembly.

Thank you.